

**REMARKS BY  
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JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF**

**LA WORLD AFFAIRS COUNCIL**

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ADMIRAL MIKE MULLEN: (In progress) – and the expertise of other federal and non-government agencies. Fewer than one in 20 provincial reconstruction teams in Afghanistan are currently staffed by civilian personnel. We need the willing cooperation of partner governments like that in Pakistan and Afghanistan and, yes, Iraq, where elected leaders are indeed exerting themselves more and more.

We need to think about engaging people and places we have perhaps ignored. I was struck by something George Shultz once recalled about President Ronald Reagan. He said President Reagan understood that difficulties most arise when countries talk about each other rather than with each other. And I couldn't help but thinking how much more the national defense could be bolstered, even in places like Iran, by the simple weapon of good conversation.

Again, it comes back, it comes back to relationships. It should have been lost on no one, not one of us two weeks ago that Afghanistan's President Karzai attended the swearing in of Pakistan's new president Asif Ali Zardari and the two pledged to support one another. That sort of burgeoning cooperation and dialogue will prove critical.

But we also need to understand there is more to the Middle East than Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan and that there's more to the world than the Middle East. From sheriffs in the Philippines to pilots in Indonesia and the Horn of Africa, extremists have demonstrated the desire to disrupt our interests around the world. The global economic centers of gravity have in fact been steadily shifting towards the Pacific and this too is a region of vital concern.

Half the world's economy and nearly 60 percent of its population call the Asia-Pacific region home. The region accounts for a third of U.S. imports. That's more than \$600 billion annually. Users of the port of Los Angeles alone generate some \$12 billion in import and export revenue. And more than half of Asia's oil is imported from the

Middle East and must pass through the narrow Strait of Molucca before reaching its destination.

Lingering concerns about North Korea's nuclear ambitions, the likelihood of future disaster relief missions and the growing need for stronger military relationships throughout the region all point to a heightened sense of urgency for us in the Pacific Rim. All of this is to say that the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan will come to an end, as all wars do, but America's responsibilities to lead throughout the world will not.

To prepare for this future, the American military must remain a total joint expeditionary force suited to irregular warfare against asymmetric threats and capable of operating with our international partners in activities ranging from civic and humanitarian assistance to theater security and cooperation, but also capable of full combat operations. That's why the Joint Chiefs and I spend a lot of time thinking and planning for the future.

It isn't enough for us to fight the fight we're in; it's about making sure we're also ready for the fight that could be coming. We must stay mindful of the core war-fighting capabilities, resources and skills we need to successfully deter conflict and, failing that, conduct operations across the spectrum of military missions and responsibilities. We must constantly assess the strategic environment, use that assessment to inform our decisions about military requirements and develop the appropriate programs and budgets to deliver the right capabilities. With an eye beyond Iraq and Afghanistan, we must rebalance our strategic risk.

Our Air Force is in desperate need of modernization. The Navy's fleet is still too small for the sorts of demands we believe it will face in the coming years. And there are young Marines who have never deployed aboard a Navy ship and Army officers who've not been able to focus on their mission and their skill of providing artillery fire support.

These sorts of gaps in professional expertise cannot persist, particularly at a time when we are being called upon – and should be called upon – to stay better engaged around the world: improving international interagency cooperation and fostering security and stability.

I've been asked before about the amount of resources we devoted, a percentage of gross domestic product to the national defense. Currently, it is just over 4 percent. I have also asked this question not because I think it's a good or bad number or even because I think GDP is necessarily the best way to measure it, but because we need to have an informed debate in our country about what national defense really means, what exactly are our vital national interests in this new era, how do we secure them and with what allocation of precious resources do we advance them.

We don't always do a good job of predicting the future idly. If you had told me on August 7<sup>th</sup> that the next day the Russian tanks would be moving into Georgia, I'm not sure I would have believed you. And while none of us can ever get it perfectly right,

those of us charged with leading the discussion, those of us held accountable for it must try. We would be derelict in our duty if we didn't.

And that really brings me to my last point, and then I'll take your questions, and that is that because a balanced national defense is not purely a military burden, as Americans we must ensure we're doing all we can to either assist in that defense or, at the very least, care for those who bear the burden. I'm not suggesting compulsory military service or even that everyone up and enlist, though I am certainly willing to take names tonight should anybody be interested. (Laughter.)

I am suggesting that we could all find ways to contribute to the national good within our own areas of influence and interest. This can be done through volunteer work, through donations of time, money and effort. It can be done through federal service of a non-military sort or even the support of non-governmental relief and charity organizations.

I visited the Los Angeles veterans hospital on Saturday. And earlier today I stopped by an organization called New Directions which helps find work and shelter for homeless veterans. There are some 20 to 30,000 of those in the greater Los Angeles areas. They are doing amazing things, really, that really make a difference in the lives and the futures of our servicemen and women and their families, things that focus on their abilities, not just their disabilities.

A great example of Californians getting involved is found in the Wounded Marine Careers Foundation of San Diego. They provide career training and job placement for wounded warriors, giving them skills for careers immediately following their rehabilitation. On March 20<sup>th</sup>, the first class of 19 Marines, many of them from the Wounded Warrior regimen, graduated from the Careers in Media program. One of them was gunnery sergeant Nick Pop (sp). Many of you will remember the images of a cigar-smoking Marine in the turret in front of the falling Saddam Hussein statue during the liberation of Baghdad. That was Gunny Pop. His photo was seen around the world.

In 2004, the gunny was injured during the Battle of Fallujah. An RPG hit him in the right side of his head and he lost his right eye, his sense of smell, suffered permanent hearing loss in his right ear. When asked to describe his road to recovery, Gunny Pop called it "the most motivating experience of my life and has restored my faith in the youth of America." In July, Gunny Pop was inducted into the International – sorry, inducted into the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees' Union. This union card will get him onto any studio set.

Last Thursday, in fact, he was on the scene in San Diego as a sound engineer covering the launch of the USNS Carl Brashear, where he met Robert De Niro, star of "Men of Honor," the story of Chief Petty Officer Carl Brashear. Gunny Pop, his wife, April, and their two boys, Richard and Nicholas, have been given a new lease on life. Their American dream is still out there to be sought and to be achieved.

Thanks to people who cared, he has – and his family has – a brighter future. There are thousands more like Gunny Pop, many of whom bear no visible scars of war, but who are wounded nonetheless, men and women who have defended you and me and everything we stand for and now only need someone to stand for them. I'm convinced there are many others out there in this country likewise willing to help, a virtual sea of goodwill. And I would only ask you to join it and help us all connect to it.

Let me return to what I said at the outset: We've been raised in this country to believe that the defense of our vital national interest is largely the providence of the Pentagon. Not any more, ladies and gentlemen, not any more. Thank you.

MR. : Ladies and gentlemen, we have some time tonight. We will get to as many questions as we can and we will – I would ask you, as usual, to please make them questions and make them as brief as possible. And I'm going to start with the head table that had one originally.

Q: You touched on some readiness issues. United States military has operated for a number of years through the concept of being able to fight one-and-a-half wars, one major war and one regional war simultaneously. Is that still a valid concept? If not, where are we – where should we be and what readiness resources do we need to achieve that goal?

ADM. MULLEN: We, actually, at the very senior level, in fact, as recently as two weeks ago, sat down with all of my contemporary service chiefs and the combatant commanders, the four-stars, in areas around the world to discuss exactly this topic. We will – the new administration – about a year from now, engage in the development of exactly answering that question. And, broadly, what I believe is relevant is the ability to respond to one major contingency and also to be able to handle an irregular war not unlike where we are right now.

I've said on many occasions that a floor of about 4 percent gross domestic product is what we need, at minimum, to resource who we are in the military and the strategic appetite of the country and meet the challenges that we have out there. So that – the one-plus-one construct is something that I think is very relevant. Clearly the context of the other conflict, of the second fighting, if you will, the irregular-warfare fight, is different from the one-plus-one or the two that has held us in good stead for many years.

I think we've got to move to a new construct tied to the world that we're living in.

Q: Could you please comment on the Afghan-Pakistan border and recently the news that the Pakistanis might fire on our soldiers and commanders in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

MR. : Could you just comment on those things happening on the Afghan-Pakistani borders in particular commenting on the issues of firing on American soldiers?

ADM. MULLEN: I, as I indicated, I just got back from there last Wednesday. It was my fifth trip to meet with my counterpart. The great focus of those visits is establishing and sustaining a strong relationship so that accidents like that just don't happen. We realize that we've got American forces on the Afghan side and there are clearly Pakistani forces on the Pakistani side; they are in proximity. We actually have liaison officers on both sides in communication to make sure that we de-conflict any possible opportunity which may occur.

It's a very dangerous place. It's a very – it's very tough terrain so it's not an easy problem to solve. But from the leadership standpoint, I don't anticipate that there's going to be – there will be any kind of fire fights between the Pakistani military and the United States military.

Q: Admiral Mullen, my name is Neil Banks. My son just returned from Iraq and my question centers around – I'll paraphrase the issue – communication problems. Charlie Wilson will admit that the fact that we left Afghanistan and no one lived there virtually – the majority of the population didn't know what happened or what we had done. Will there be – and this is providence of war; this is after we leave – will there be a feeling within Congress that we should continue to communicate. In your opinion, will they fund that?

ADM. MULLEN: I think that the commitment in Afghanistan is going to go on for a while. Afghanistan is, by some measures, ranked as the fifth-poorest country in the world and it's going to take significant effort on the part of the international community – obviously of which we are a part – to invest in that development.

The Afghan security forces are actually progressing pretty well, the Army. The police is lagging significantly behind, all of which to me – and we've got a rising insurgency that's getting tougher – all of which to me indicates that we're going to be there for a while. Clearly the goal is to create a security force, a government – not create a government, support a government, development of a government, both central and local to allow the Afghan people and the Afghan government to provide for the security and the services after which I would expect our troops would come home.

I think it's going to be a while and it's not just our troops because there are also individuals from other parts of our government which are – who are there now and I think we are going to have to expand that to assist them in things like the rule of law, institutional, both stand-up and in fact being able to run a government or organizations.

I certainly would expect that, given the lessons that we've learned from when we went before and when others have gone before, and I know that my dealings with the Afghan leadership that there's an expectation that the United States and the Afghan people – the American people and the Afghan people and our governments – will continue to be strong allies. And in that connection, I certainly would expect communication to be a big part.

Q: Is promoting NATO membership in the Caucasus region – is that causing Russia to misbehave or are they already prone to misbehavior and our NATO efforts there make sense? And then, quickly, is the Venezuelan military – (inaudible) – worry us at all?

ADM. MULLEN: I'm not overly concerned about the exercise of Russia and Venezuela. I think there are a couple of unmanned, unarmed, sorry, bombers and some of their ships. I think it's a signal that we've got to be mindful of in the relationship that is evolving and what does it mean for security and stability long term. So I don't think we can ignore it, but I'm certainly not alarmed by it at this particular point.

With respect to what happened recently, I think the jury's still out in terms of what that really means. Clearly, it surprised us all. It was a combination of the invasion of Georgia and also the recognition of the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia and there has been quite a bit of international pushback. There's a lot of international unity with respect to that. I think the NATO Alliance piece here, the alliance piece is very important and I think when NATO is reaffirmed and we're a member of NATO that Georgia and the Ukraine are clearly still on a track to become members of NATO.

At the same time, I think we have to have a relationship with Russia. We have common interests from economics to proliferation of weapons of mass destruction to engagement with or how do we approach Iran, et cetera. And what's happened recently, as I think Secretary Gates said the other day, certainly calls into question the ease with which that relationship might be sustained. But, that notwithstanding, I think it's important to have that relationship and that we all look at this from a standpoint of not overreacting at this particular point in time and certainly staying unified in our response, particularly as it goes through NATO.

MR. : In the back there, please. All the way in the back.

Q: For years the Sunnis and the Shiites in Iraq have been against each other. We came in there thinking that we could solve the situation there. Had they been in Afghanistan and seeing what the country is like within the last 25 years, I feel that we're wasting our time staying in Iraq when we should really be sending our forces to Afghanistan and trying to get rid of the people who are trying to attack the government there.

In fact, Kabul has been attacked just recently, as you know. And I –

MR. : Could we have a question, please?

Q: I feel that what my question to you is, why don't we pull our troops out of Iraq and move them over to Afghanistan and really help the country get rid of these people that have been trying to attack us?

ADM. MULLEN: Conditions in Iraq have improved remarkably over the last year. And I think indicative of that was the decision, based on a recommendation that came from the commanders on the ground up through me, to start reducing our troops in Iraq and, in fact, a recommendation that we take a battalion brigade who are in Iraq and essentially move them out.

Tied to that was a decision to send an additional battalion of Marines and brigade from – that were actually headed to Iraq – to Afghanistan. So we have needs in Afghanistan. The president's recent decision certainly is heading in the direction that you describe. And as conditions continue to improve in Iraq, I am very hopeful that we'll continue to be able to do to make those kinds of decisions with respect to direction of where the force is going.

Q: Admiral, I've seen you on "60 Minutes." The Democratic nominee said, in effect, that if he should be elected, one of the first orders of business in the first week after these elections will be to call in the Joint Chiefs of Staff for consultation. Assuming he is the president-elect, can you give us an idea of what you and your colleagues on the Joint Chiefs might say to the president?

ADM. MULLEN: We are in a time of transition right now, which I consider to be a time of vulnerability for our country. If you go back to 1961 and look at the period four months January 20<sup>th</sup> in the first year after a new administration comes in and you look at the number of events, major events in the world that have occurred, they are significant in number. And you can overlay that with the difficult time for me that – the concerns that we have and the challenge that we have right now that are out there, which run a full spectrum of the kinds of things from weapons of mass destruction – my biggest concern is that terrorists could get their hands on these nuclear weapons, the proliferation of them, et cetera.

And as I'm sure you understand, I serve at the will of the president. I carry out the president's policies. That's what all of us in the military do and that I will give advice and recommendations comprehensively to whoever is there on – whoever the president is on January 20<sup>th</sup> whether it be the "60 Minutes" interviewee last night or his competition for that job on the Republican side.

And so I recognize where we are. I think we've got to be mindful of this transition. We're doing a lot of work to make sure we're focused and to work as hard as we possibly can to make sure nothing bad happens and, yet, and if something does, being able to respond to it. And I will give the president my advice as I do this one from the moment we have a new president.

MR. : In the back, over to the side, the lady just –

Q: This morning the Army – (off mike, inaudible) – say that for the foreseeable future – (off mike, inaudible) – fight a war without the people supporting it in our country. How can we mobilize that support?

ADM. MULLEN: I fundamentally believe that we will engage with our military and the rest of our government, as I have talked about and remarked, in response to the will of the American people. I haven't seen the Army globalization of 2008, but now that you mention it, I'll certainly look at it when I get back later on this week.

But it does speak on – I'm certainly familiar with how General Casey thinks and he's one of the Joint Chiefs. And all of us are concerned about environmental issues; all of us are concerned about population flows. We're concerned about resource storages, not just fuel or not just oil and gas, but water and what that means to stability and instability.

We believe that we are in a time now of persistent conflict. Our ability to predict, as I indicated earlier, exactly where that's going to be is – we don't have a great track record for that. That's why a balanced force that can handle the full spectrum of capabilities I think is an important one. And so I am not certain because I haven't read it, but I think underpinning that globalization strategy are these kinds of thoughts which we've actually looked at pretty hard.

So we think we're going to be out and about and engaged around the world in an expeditionary fashion on all of our services, including the Army. And you asked me an Army question; I know I'm a Navy guy, but I can tell you, I spent the better part of last year with the United States Army, with our Army and understanding how they operate, understanding how they – what makes them tick or learning to understand that.

And I believe our ground forces are a center of gravity right now for the United States military because they've been pressed so hard. And even in that, the United States Army as the center of gravity of our ground forces, they've been pressed hard, performed exceptionally well, been truly remarkably resilient given the length of deployments and the number of them, as have their families. And I'm very encouraged by these 2.2 million young men and women, which I probably don't have to remind you, but I think it's important to say anyways; when you go to any unit in our military, the average age in that unit is about 20 or 21 years old. And we have asked them to do enormously important things for us as a country and we'll continue to do so in the future.

So we see a time of fairly significant turbulence, uncertainty and danger for which our military has got to be broadly prepared.

Q: Admiral, I wanted to know, in your opinion, what is the state of the Iraqi army today and how do you feel – can you explain some of the challenges that the American military face trying to train a proper Iraqi army

ADM. MULLEN: It has – the state of the Iraqi army, it has improved almost exponentially. I mean, I don't have these numbers exactly right. But out of 160 battalions that they have, I think the number is 107 or 108 who are actually leading in operations.



We have a very tough fight going on right now in Mosul, and have had for a couple months. And it's going to continue. When I visited up there with the Iraqi general – lieutenant general by the name of Riyadh who has a confidence, a command, a passion for his country and for getting this right. And I see that represented throughout Iraq, either personally or others relay that to me.

The same is true in Basra, where the Iraqis have had the lead for a significant period of time. And so, I see them confident, dedicated, getting better. And I'm confident that in time they will be able to essentially fully accept the responsibility of providing the security that they need to provide to their people.

We've also had a fairly dramatic improvement in the evolution of their police. It lagged the army. It seems as though in insurgencies, that's always the case. That's a very tough problem. But we've seen pretty dramatic improvements there as well. So that's all part of the readiness – or that's all part of the assessment, which goes into our comfort level that we have that the risks of starting to move our forces out of there is low at this particular point in time.

Q: Admiral, would you compare or contrast the spreading – (inaudible) – two countries there with that of the American intervention in Serbia, which had a – (inaudible) – even into today.

ADM. MULLEN: Actually, the current comparison where I think it actually works against what Russia did is Russia has argued for the lack of independence obviously for Kosovo, and yet called for the independence of these two other countries. I think the response that we, back in the '90s, when we intervened in the Balkans was in response to massive genocide and those kinds of literally war crimes that we just couldn't stand for. And that clearly was not what was going on in Georgia the other day when the Russians went in. So I think there are clearly significant differences in that regard.

What this means long term, as I indicated before, with respect to not just Georgia but other former states of the Soviet Union – and I was just in Sofia about a week ago Saturday with my NATO counterparts. And I can assure you that there are concerns on the part of the Baltics and concerns on the part of other countries who border Russia about what this means. We don't quite have all this figured out. Certainly I am – and I am hopeful that the Russians will not continue to extend that. And they haven't indicated – they've been pushed hard against in the international community. So I think there are significant differences, at least as I think through your question, with the motivation we have versus what the Russians had very recently.

Q: This morning on C-SPAN, I watched the testimony at a Senate hearing. It's all about the corruption and fraud and money laundering that is going on in Iraq right now. I saw that this morning. Money laundering, \$600 million out of Iraq to Jordan. They couldn't get it out through the airport. They called somebody at the American embassy.

ADM. MULLEN: Can we get a question please?

Q: Are you aware or is the government aware of what's going on over there right now?

ADM. MULLEN: Well, I mean, I've seen reports over many months now of the availability of electricity in Baghdad. It's not enough. There are many citizens who are anxious to have it dramatically increase. And again, there's a lot of pressure being brought on the government to provide services.

That there was corruption in Iraq and that there is corruption in Iraq and that it is not eliminated, I think, is a fact. How much is there? One of the things that is I think yet to be determined – and I haven't heard the testimony, so I don't – I'd need to see the specifics of this. That said, I dealt an awful lot with General Petraeus and with Ambassador Crocker. And the level of knowledge about what goes on in that country that is resident in the embassy on Ambassador Crocker's side and in the MNFI, which is our military command there, is extremely extensive.

Does it have it down to a level of detail that you're describing and how routine is that? I just don't know. I am sure that this testimony – typically, depending on what it is – will certainly pique interest to try to make sure we understand where the money is and where it's flowing.

Q: Maliki was involved.

ADM. MULLEN: Well, I'm certainly not in a position to be able to respond to that.

Q: (inaudible) – hydrogen bomb. And I'm not sure whether they are bluffing or serious. If so, what is your consideration about that?

ADM. MULLEN: Certainly back to the relationship with Russia and the – I mean, Russia still has within its own nuclear capability, whether it's developing another nuclear weapon or not, the ability to do massive – and just in terms of numbers of nuclear weapons that they have – to still be able to launch a massive strike of nuclear weapons against the United States. And clearly, that is something I think is an extremely, extremely, extremely low probability. But it's within their capability to do that.

So I think for all major countries with nuclear weapons, we need to understand what we have in our arsenal, obviously what their potential is, and work as diligently as we can to make sure that never happens.

Q: As this relates to Pakistan, you just had a change in government. Are you at all concerned about the weaponry that is in Pakistan and whether it's in complete control so that it doesn't get loose?

ADM. MULLEN: To the best of my ability to understand it – and that is with some ability – the weapons there are secure. And that even in the change of government, the controls of those weapons haven't changed. That said, they are their weapons. They're not my weapons. And there are limits to what I know. Certainly at a worst-case scenario with respect to Pakistan, I worry a great deal about those weapons falling into the hands of terrorists and either being proliferated or potentially used. And so, control of those, stability, stable control of those weapons is a key concern. And I think certainly the Pakistani leadership that I've spoken with on both the military and civilian side understand that.

Q: Thank you for taking my question, Admiral. This is going to be very controversial, but I think it's something that needs to be addressed. Are you familiar with the recently released book, "The Transparent Cabal" that talks about the neoconservatives of the American Enterprise Institute?

ADM. MULLEN: Transparent –

Q: It's called – I've got a copy I'm going to give you.

ADM. MULLEN: Cabal?

Q: "The Transparent Cabal."

ADM. MULLEN: Right, no, I'm not.

Q: Yeah, it talks to these same American Enterprise Institute neoconservatives, according to Bob Woodward's recently released book, General Keane who works with them, The Jewish Institute on National Security Affairs, JINSA – Colin Powell said they were in control at the Pentagon. The Washington Post's editor Karen DeYoung's father wrote about them, of JINSA. Bottom line is I respect you very much. You were in Israel recently and you told Israel recently to not pull another U.S.S. Liberty attack in the Persian Gulf. I just gave you a letter there from one of the survivors who extends you that courage. Very few military officers will basically take that issue on. And you did and I salute you.

The question I have, will you stand for the Constitution if President Bush with these same AEI neocons circumvent the Pentagon like they did with the surge? And Woodward said, they had General Jack Keane come up to AEI, meet with Dick Cheney and associated with these people. Will you stand up for the Constitution, sir, and say no when they order an attack on Iran?

ADM. MULLEN: Well, certainly, the circumstances under which –

Q: Sir, we'll get it for the record.

ADM. MULLEN: Certainly, as the senior military advisor to the president, whoever he is, I give my advice and then I take my direction from the president. I will continue to do that. I have been very clear about where I am with respect to Iran. You may be giving me a little more credit. I actually on occasion – I get either quoted or misquoted about what I've said. I haven't told anybody about my conversations in Israel. I have a very close relationship with the head of the IDF and stay engaged with him because of, one, the closeness from an allied point of view, the importance of it. And obviously, the existential threat that Iran says it's developing and the existential threat that that would be to Israel. So it goes to actually my belief that we cannot afford to let Iran develop a nuclear weapon. I think it would be incredibly destabilizing.

It would be incredibly destabilizing in a part of the world, a region of the world that is already pretty unstable. And the unintended consequences of that is something that we need to pay attention to even if we couldn't figure out exactly what they might be. Each circumstance, each situation, each decision that the president makes, again, whoever it is, is one I have an open channel to the president to give him my free and frank opinions. And I do that. And I think that is a vital part of my constitutional responsibility as the senior military officer and the senior ranking active-duty military officer of the United States. And I take that responsibility very seriously. I do not prognosticate about what might happen or what if. And I just won't go there with respect to that.

Q: Sir, just a quick follow-up.

MR. : Sir, we have –

Q: He's written an article called "Israel –

MR. : Sir, we have many others who have come to ask questions. And I would ask you please to please sit down or I'll have to ask you to leave the room.

Q: (Inaudible) – American citizens –

MR. : Sir, sit down.

Q: You mentioned the value of NATO. In this troubled world, what is the value of NATO today when we have our allies in NATO with Old Europe in particular who not only give very few troops but the troops they give don't fight?

ADM. MULLEN: Actually I spend a lot of time in NATO. As I indicated, just last week, I was with all my counterparts from NATO discussing actually all day on two subjects. The first subject was Afghanistan. The second subject was Russia-Georgia. And I think that we need to acknowledge that if you look back over the last year, NATO has actually increased its troop level in Afghanistan from about 20,000 to 30,000. And in fact, the French just added a battalion. And practically not long after they got there, they

lost 10 French soldiers. The French, the Dutch, the Canadians, the non-NATO allies the Australians have fought side by side with us.

In fact, what I said earlier, this is not all about fighting. Clearly, we need combat troops. But there are other requirements. The countries who are democratic countries have elected governments, members of NATO; they make decisions about what they are going to do just like we do as a country. I do think it is important that we stay together as an alliance. That is going to be very difficult, particularly an alliance where one vote gets to say no to what might be a terrific idea. We've brought a lot of pressure on caveats so we can put pressure on countries with caveats so that they can do more. That continues.

I also think that NATO's relevance, not just now but in the future, is going to be directly tied to its ability to sustain an effort in Afghanistan, which it's taken on, and to do so in a way that allows Afghanistan to succeed. Part of that, which I didn't talk about but giving it to Afghanistan is going to be how we address the poppy issue, because that drug issue – the profits from that are fueling the insurgency directly, fueling the Taliban directly.

And those resources are killing our people. And it's not a military mission but it is having a military impact. And all of us have to figure out how we're going to get at that. There are 42 nations in Afghanistan, not just NATO nations. All of us have to figure out how to do that. And when we eliminate that crop, we need to be there with another crop that provides resources the moment the poppy goes away so that that farmer can feed his family.

MR. : Before Mr. Saunders comes back to close the meeting, we're going to have time for one last question.

Q: : Can you make some comments about Ahmadinejad's appearance at the U.N.?

ADM. MULLEN: Can I make some comments about Ahmadinejad's appearance at the U.N.? The U.N. has an assembly every year. Everybody comes. We obviously don't push back on that. He was here last year. He was here this year. And I suspect as long as he's president, he'll continue to come. I think it's part of the system.

MR. SAUNDERS: Admiral, thank you. We've enjoyed spending time with you and hearing your thoughts.

ADM. MULLEN: Thank you.